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3.13 WILDERNESS AND RECREATION

This section provides an overview of wilderness and recreational opportunities within the project area. The analysis considers the Proposed Project and alternatives in relation to land use plans and policies and relevant recreational plans and policies.

3.13.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.13.1.1 Regional Setting

The project area is located in southeastern California, between Palm Springs and the Colorado River, to the north and east of the Salton Sea. Several wilderness areas, recreation areas, and other natural features are located in the vicinity of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

Portions of the project area are managed under the BLM's CDCA Plan, the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO Plan), and the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (CVPA). Both the NECO Plan and CVPA were recently approved in December 2002. The CDCA Plan, the NECO Plan, and the CVPA all describe the California Desert as an important recreational resource and identify numerous wilderness areas, developed recreation areas, and dispersed recreational opportunities available to the public. Figure 3.13-1 provides a map of designated wilderness and recreation areas in the project area.

3.13.1.2 Project Area Setting

3.13.1.2.1 Designated Wilderness Areas

The Wilderness Act of 1964 provided for the establishment of a National Wilderness Preservation System with areas to be designated from federally owned public land. The FLPMA, enacted by Congress in 1976, required that the BLM inventory, study, and review all 17 million acres of public land in California for their wilderness characteristics as described in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Based on this review, additional intensive studies were conducted on approximately 7.1 million acres in California that were identified by the BLM as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Within the CDCA, approximately 5.7 million acres in 137 WSAs were studied. In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) was enacted and 69 Wilderness Areas were officially designated (U.S. Department of the Interior 1994). Eight of these wilderness areas are located within 5 miles of the Proposed Project and alternatives transmission line routes; three of them are located within 1 mile. Wilderness Areas within the Proposed Project area are identified in Table 3.13-1.

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Figure 3.13-1
Wilderness and Recreation Areas

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Table 3.13-1
Wilderness Areas

Wilderness Areas	Alternative	County/Acres	Special Features
Wilderness Areas Located Within 1 Mile of the Proposed Project and Alternatives			
Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness	Proposed Project, Alts. A, C	Riverside 80,770	Area contains habitat for the desert tortoise and a diverse array of plant and wildlife species.
Palo Verde Mountains Wilderness	Alternative B	Imperial 32,310	Clapp Spring supplies a palm oasis. Area is home to big horn sheep, desert tortoise, and wild burros.
North Algodones Dunes Wilderness	Alternative B	Imperial 32,240	At 1,000 square miles it is one of the largest dune systems in North America. Home to the Andrews dune scarab beetle. The Algodones Dunes Wildlife Viewing Area offers a staging area for hiking and wildlife viewing.
Wilderness Areas Located 1 to 5 Miles From the Proposed Project and Alternatives			
Palen-McCoy Wilderness	Proposed Project, Alts. A, C	Riverside 270,629	Contains five distinct mountain ranges: the Granite, McCoy, Palen, Little Maria, and Arica Mountains; diverse vegetation and landforms.
Little Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness	Proposed Project, Alts. A, C	Riverside and Imperial 29,880	Area is home to big horn sheep and desert tortoise.
Orocopia Mountain Wilderness	Proposed Project, Alts. A, C	Riverside 40,735	Distinct colored canyons and ridges.
Mecca Hills Wilderness	Proposed Project, Alts. A, C	Riverside 24,200	Important geological sites unique to the area.
Indian Pass Wilderness	Alternative B	Imperial 33,855	Home to Colorado river toad, great plains toad, and tree lizard, species rare in California.

Source: U.S. Department of the Interior 1994 Seim 2001.

3.13.1.2.2 Recreational Opportunities Managed by the BLM

Millions of southern California residents use the CDCA annually for a wide variety of recreational uses. Many of them travel to Imperial and Riverside Counties to explore the adjacent desert wildlands. Recreation in the CDCA is generally divided into activities in designated recreation areas, and dispersed recreational uses.

The BLM keeps records of the number of visitors and the amount of time they spend participating in recreational activities in each of its designated recreation areas. One visitor may participate in a number of activities during one visit; therefore, visitors may be counted more than once if they participate in more than one activity. Estimated recreational use for the recreation sites that fall within or partially within the project area is shown in Table 3.11-2.

Table 3.13-2
Fiscal Year 2002 Recreational Uses of Public Land in the Project Area

Recreation Sites	Visits*	Activities
Dispersed-Eastern Riverside	284,906	Camping, Bicycling, Hiking/Walking/Running, OHV-ATV, OHV-M/C, OHV-Truck/SUV/ Cars, Driving for Pleasure, Horseback Riding
Mule Mountain Long-Term Visitor Area (LTVA) (Wiley Well Campground/Coon Hollow Campground)	5,872	Camping, OHV-ATV, Hiking/Walking/Running, Rock hounding
Corn Springs Campground	408	Camping, Viewing of Cultural Sites, Hiking/Walking/Running
Dos Palmas Preserve	5,325	Viewing-Wildlife, Fishing-Freshwater, Hiking/Walking/Running
Desert Lily Preserve	376	Photography, Viewing-Interpretive Exhibit
Midland LTVA	9,125	Camping, OHV-ATV, Hiking/Walking/Running
Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area	974,067	Camping, OHV-ATV, OHV-Dunebuggy, OHV-Cars/Trucks/SUVs, Social Gathering, Vending/Services

Source: Daniels, 2003.
* Visitation was not recorded for the Imperial Dam LTVA, Mesquite Mine Overlook and Interpretive Trail, Bradshaw Trail National Back County Byway, North Algodones OHV area, Algodones Dunes Wildlife Viewing Area, Oxbow Recreation Site, and Mammoth Wash Open Area.

The following is a description of designated recreation areas and their uses in the CDCA and dispersed recreational activities in the overall CDCA.

3.13.1.2.2.1 Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area - The Imperial Sand Dunes, sometimes called the Algodones Dunes, are the largest mass of sand dunes in California. Formed from the sands of ancient Lake Cahuilla, the dune system extends for more than 40 miles in a band averaging 5 miles in width and rising to heights of 300 feet above the desert floor. The dunes are a well-known landmark to local residents and the thousands of highway travelers who pass by them every year.

This expansive recreation located just south of SR-78 near Glamis, California, area offers beautiful scenery, opportunities for solitude, habitat for rare plants and animals, and a heavily-used OHV recreation area. While summer temperatures often rise above 110 °F, the mild climate between October and May makes this area very attractive to recreationists. Visitation to the Imperial Sand Dunes has grown steadily in recent years, with approximately 750,000 annual visits by OHV enthusiasts recorded (BLM 2002a). OHV activity is permitted on more than two-thirds of the sand dunes, totaling over 118,000 acres. The three most popular areas are Glamis/Gecko, Buttercup Valley, and Dunebuggy Flats. Organized competitive or commercial OHV events such as sand drags, closed-course racing, and hill climbs are sometimes conducted on the dunes. Such events require a Special Recreation Permit from the BLM. Other types of activities, such as commercial filming or photography, promotional events, and mobile vending, also require permits. There are two campgrounds managed by the BLM which have paved parking, restrooms, and trash facilities. The Mammoth Wash, located north of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness and Buttercup Valley (south of I-8) are also part of the Imperial Sand Dunes.

3.13.1.2.2.2 Long-Term Visitor Areas - To meet the long-term needs of winter visitors while at the same time protecting the desert environment, the BLM established LTVAs where visitors may camp for the entire winter. The program was initiated in 1983 with eight LTVA sites in the Arizona and California deserts. Two LTVAs are located near the Proposed Project and alternatives alignments. The Midland LTVA is located approximately 8 miles north of Blythe. The Mule Mountains LTVA encompasses 3,424 acres and includes both Wiley's Well and Coon Hollow Campgrounds, which are described below. This LTVA is located on Wiley's Well Road, 9 miles south of I-10.

3.13.1.2.2.3 BLM Campgrounds – BLM operates a number of designated campgrounds in the project area to serve recreational users of the CDCA. Wiley's Well Campground is located on Wiley's Well Road, 9 miles south of I-10. It is adjacent to the Bradshaw Trail and within the Mule Mountains LTVA. The campground is a year-round facility with 14 campsites, and provides picnic tables, grills, shade ramadas and handicapped-accessible vault toilets.

The Coon Hollow Campground is located on Wiley's Well Road, 3 miles south of the Bradshaw Trail and Wiley's Well Campground. It is a popular retreat for "snowbirds" within the Mule Mountains LTVA. The campground is a year-round facility with 28 campsites providing picnic tables, grills, shade armadas, and handicapped-accessible vault toilets; however, potable water is not available on site.

The Corn Springs Campground was developed by the BLM in 1968 and is located in the Corn Springs ACEC. The area has been designated as an ACEC to provide special management attention to its rich and diverse wildlife and vegetation, unique archaeological sites, and scenic values. The campground is located deep in a canyon of the Chuckwalla Mountains, and is situated by a stand of more than 60 native California fan palms, 10 miles south from I-10. Nine camp sites, including one group site, are available with tables, grills, potable water, and shade ramadas. Handicap accessible vaulted toilets are also available in this campground. The Corn Springs Campground also has a 0.5 mile interpretive trail. Although it is open year-round, the majority of visits occur from November to April.

3.13.1.2.2.4 Bradshaw Trail National Back County Byway - Bradshaw Trail is part of the National Back County Byways program, which is the BLM's unique contribution to the larger National Scenic Byways program. This program was formed as a result of the mid 1980s study by the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors that found that 43 percent of American adults identified driving for pleasure as a favorite pastime. Dedicated as a Back County Byway in November 1992, the Bradshaw Trail, located in southeastern Riverside County with a small segment in Imperial County, is an east-west trail beginning approximately 3 miles north of the community of North Shore near the Salton Sea State Recreation Area. The eastern end of the trail is 2 miles southwest of the community of Ripley near the Colorado River, approximately 18 miles to the southwest of Blythe. The trail is a maintained route, but use of a 4WD vehicle is recommended.

3.13.1.2.2.5 Mesquite Mine Overlook and Interpretive Trail - The Mesquite Mine Trail is located 3 miles north of SR-78, along GFOC Mine Road, approximately 4 miles east of Glamis. This trail is a self-guided interpretive trail which introduces users to the gold mine, and to the unique desert environment in which it is located.

3.13.1.2.2.6 Camp Young Divisional Camp and the General George S. Patton Memorial Museum - The Desert Training Center, California-Arizona Maneuver Area was created in 1942. General Patton selected the approximately 18,000-square-mile area in the California and Arizona deserts to train soldiers for combat in North Africa during World War II. In addition to the maneuvers areas, the Desert Training Center included 11 camps, including the headquarters, Camp Young. Camp Young occupies approximately 3,000 acres and is located approximately 25 miles east of Indio in Riverside County. In 1947, the site was relinquished to the BLM after most of the infrastructure at the Camp had been removed. In 1989, the General George S. Patton Memorial Museum was established at Chiriaco Summit with exhibits that display memorabilia from the life and career of General Patton as well as use of the area for desert training during World War II.

3.13.1.2.2.7 Algodones Dunes Wildlife Viewing Area - The Algodones Dunes are home to the Pierson's milk vetch, a plant listed as threatened by the USFWS, and the Algodones Dunes sunflower, a state-listed species. The flat-tailed horned lizard, soon to be proposed for listing as threatened by the USFWS, also occurs here, as does the Colorado Desert Fringed-toed Lizard, a BLM sensitive species. Desert tortoises, a federal- and state-listed species, occur to the east of the dunes. Several other species of special concern and BLM sensitive species also occur in this area. The Algodones Dunes Wildlife Viewing Area is located just east of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area and is often used as a trailhead for trips into the wilderness area.

3.13.1.2.2.8 Dos Palmas Preserve - The Dos Palmas Preserve is managed by the BLM. It includes a unique oasis tucked between the Salton Sea and the Chocolate and Orocopia Mountains. The 1,400-acre preserve contains hundreds of fan palms and pools fed by artisan springs and seepage from the nearby Coachella Canal which creates a lush wetland area that provides habitat for threatened and endangered species.

The Dos Palmas Preserve is home to many unique birds and animals. The California black rail (listed by the state as Threatened) makes its home here, hiding among the cattails and bulrush. Other residents include the leaf-nosed bat and prairie falcons. The water also attracts American avocets, least bitterns, black-necked stilts, snowy egrets, osprey, lesser scaup, and buffleheads. Other animals include the unique flat-tailed horned lizard and other reptiles. Desert pupfish may be seen in the ponds. Colorado Valley woodrats also find a home here. Different wildlife can be viewed year-round, including shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl and birds of prey. Winter is an especially good time for bird watching and the spring and fall allow for views of many visiting songbirds, fish, and reptiles.

3.13.1.2.2.9 Dispersed Recreation in the CDCA - Dispersed recreational uses are not focused on one location, but occur on a scattered basis throughout much of the CDCA public land. Dispersed recreation activities include rock hunting, OHV use, sightseeing, camping, hunting, hiking, and horseback riding. As a group, dispersed recreationists make use of the project area at any time of the year and without the constraints of a permit system. The dispersed recreational activities of the area generate a noticeable economic benefit to desert communities near the study area.

3.13.1.2.2.10 Colorado River Recreation Sites - North of Winterhaven on both sides of the Colorado River, developed recreation sites managed by BLM can be found. These areas offer campgrounds with a 14-day stay limit, in addition to the Imperial Dam LTVA. Camping, swimming, fishing, and boating are popular activities.

3.13.1.2.3 Recreational Opportunities Managed by the National Park Service

Joshua Tree National Park, which experienced visitation of over 1.3 million in 1999, is located just north of the Proposed Project and Alternative A and C transmission line route to the east of the Coachella Valley. The park features a variety of unique desert vegetation, including natural gardens of creosote bush, ocotillo, and cholla cactus. The higher elevations of the park provide a more moist, and slightly cooler Mojave Desert habitat for the Joshua tree. In addition to Joshua tree forests, the western part of the park includes some of the most interesting geologic displays found in California's deserts. Five fan palm oases are also located in the park, indicating those few areas where water occurs naturally and wildlife abounds.

3.13.1.2.4 Recreational Opportunities Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The recently renamed Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1930 as a refuge and breeding ground for wildlife. As it is one of the premiere bird watching spots in the nation, thousands of outdoor enthusiasts flock to the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge to bird watch. Other recreational activities include wildlife observation, photography, picnicking, waterfowl hunting, fishing, and nature trails.

The Imperial National Wildlife Refuge is located adjacent to the Picacho State Recreation Area. The Imperial National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1941 to protect and preserve plant and animal life found in the lower Colorado River region. About half of the refuge is designated as wilderness. Recreational opportunities include hiking, boating, wildlife viewing, fishing, and hunting. Camping and off-road vehicle travel are not permitted on the refuge.

The Cibola National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1964 to preserve and enhance wintering grounds for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Over 200 species of birds are found on the refuge, including many species of songbirds. Recreational opportunities include fishing, hunting, boating, and wildlife viewing. Camping and off-road vehicle travel are not permitted on the refuge.

3.13.1.2.5 Recreational Opportunities Managed by the State of California

3.13.1.2.5.1 Salton Sea State Recreation Area - The largest inland body of water in California, the Salton Sea is 40 miles long and 9 to 15 miles wide. The Salton Sea was created by the flooding of the Colorado River in the summers of 1905 and 1907. The Salton Sea offers many recreational activities such as fishing, boating, water sports and camping. Autumn and winter are peak seasons for recreational activities, as the temperature often remains in the 70 to 80 degree range. The Salton Sea State Recreation Area is 30 miles south of Indio on Highway 111.

3.13.1.2.5.2 Pichaco State Recreation Area - The Picacho State Recreation Area is located along the Colorado River, in the southeastern portion of Imperial County. The Picacho State Recreation Area offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities including water sports and fishing, the most popular activities. The area also supports an abundance of plants and animals: Gambel's quail, roadrunners, coyotes, and desert bighorn sheep. The best access to the area is from Picacho Road.

3.13.1.2.6 Recreational Opportunities Managed by Multiple Agencies

3.13.1.2.6.1 Coachella Valley Preserve System - Developed in 1985 by the Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard Habitat Conservation Plan, the preserve consists of three management areas: the Coachella Valley Preserve, the Willow Hole/Edom Hill Preserves/ACEC's, and the Whitewater Floodplain Preserve. Each of these areas are cooperatively managed by the BLM, USFWS, CDFG, CDPR, and the Center for Natural Lands Management. The Coachella Valley Preserve System is intended primarily to protect and enhance the habitat of the endangered Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard, although the preserve provides habitat for additional threatened and endangered species.

3.13.1.2.6.2 Indio Hills Palms - The Indio Hills Palm Park, operated by the Nature Conservancy in cooperation with the California Department of State Parks, is located 4 miles north of Indio. A 2,206-acre wild parkland where native California fan palms thrive due to groundwater captured within the San Andres Fault. Contiguous to this property is the Coachella Valley Preserve. The CDFG and the Nature Conservancy are also involved in the management of this preserve and property acquisition efforts.

3.13.1.3 Regulatory Setting

3.13.1.3.1 Bureau of Land Management

Management goals for wilderness and recreation uses on BLM land are provided in the CDCA Plan, and the recently approved plan amendments embodied in the NECO Plan and CVPA. Wilderness management in the project area is further directed by the 1964 Wilderness Act, the 1994 California Desert Protection Act, FLPMA, and other BLM regulations outlined in Title 43, CFR, Part 6300.

3.13.1.3.1.1 National Wilderness Goals - The following wilderness management goals are used to direct the objectives, policy, management strategies, and actions in congressionally designated wilderness areas.

- To provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the area's wilderness character under the principle of non-degradation. The area's natural condition, opportunities for solitude, opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation and any ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value present will be managed so that they remain unimpaired.
- To manage the wilderness area for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the area unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The wilderness resource will be dominant in all management decisions where a choice must be made between preservation of wilderness character and visitor use.
- To manage the area using minimal tools, equipment, or structures necessary to successfully, safely, and economically accomplish the objective. The chosen tool, equipment, or structure should be the one which least degrades the wilderness values temporarily or permanently. Management will seek to preserve the spontaneity of use and as much freedom from regulation as possible.

- To manage nonconforming but accepted uses permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of the area's wilderness character. Nonconforming uses are the exception rather than the rule; therefore, emphasis is placed on maintaining wilderness character (Seim 2001).

3.13.1.3.1.2 Recreation Management Goals - The CDCA Plan and its recently adopted amendments identify the following management goals for recreation:

- Provide for a wide range of quality recreational opportunities and experiences emphasizing dispersed undeveloped use;
- Provide a minimum of recreational facilities. Those facilities should emphasize resource protection and visitor safety;
- Manage recreation use to minimize user conflicts, provide a safe recreation environment, and protect desert resources;
- Emphasize the use of public information and education techniques to increase public awareness, enjoyment, and sensitivity to desert resources;
- Adjust management approach to accommodate changing visitor use patterns and preferences; and
- Encourage the use and enjoyment of desert recreation opportunities by special populations, and provide facilities to meet the needs of those groups (BLM, California Desert District 1999).

3.13.1.3.1.3 Motorized Vehicle Use Management Goals - OHV use is a popular activity in the California desert. The CDCA Plan and recently adopted plan amendments have the following management goals for motorized vehicle use:

- Provide for constrained motorized vehicle access in a manner that balances the needs of all desert users, private landowners, and other public agencies;
- When designating or amending areas or routes for motorized vehicle access, to the degree possible, avoid adverse impacts to desert resources;
- Use maps, signs, and published information to communicate the motorized vehicle access situation to desert users. Be sure all information materials are understandable and easy to follow.

3.13.1.3.2 National Park Service

On October 31, 1994, Public Law 103-433 added 234,000 acres to Joshua Tree National Monument and changed its status from national monument to national park. The land that was added by the legislation comprises primarily backcountry and wilderness areas. In 1995, the National Park Service has adopted a General Management Plan to administer the developed zone of the former national monument. In 2000, the National Park Service adopted an amendment to the General Management Plan, the Backcounty and Wilderness Management Plan, to administer the undeveloped park land and the land added to the park in 1994 (the majority of the park land).

The General Management Plan and the Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan developed goals to achieve the park's purpose. These goals are to:

- Manage land and wilderness to preserve them unimpaired for future generations;
- Participate cooperatively in the preservation of ecological units that extend beyond the park boundary;
- Improve knowledge of natural and cultural resources;
- Manage visitation more effectively and reduce impacts associated with dispersed and poorly defined visitor use facilities;
- Educate park visitors regarding the National Park Service mission and the natural and cultural resources of the park;
- Facilitate cooperative planning throughout the California desert ecosystem with other public agencies and communities;
- Improve park circulation; focus on safety, visual quality, and visitor experience; and
- Improve the effectiveness of park operations (National Park Service 2000).

3.13.1.3.3 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The management of individual national wildlife refuges are dictated by the legislation, executive order, or administrative action that creates the refuge. In general, the USFWS takes an ecosystem approach to managing the refuges. In the three national wildlife refuges near the project area, off-road vehicle travel is not permitted, all plant and animal species are protected, boating and water skiing are allowed only in specified areas, and hunting is highly regulated.

Legislative mandates that regulate the national wildlife refuge system include Executive Order 12996, signed in 1996, which defines a conservation mission for the refuge system. This Executive Order defined four principles for the management and general public use of the national wildlife refuge system:

- Public Use. The refuge system provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.
- Habitat. Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high-quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The refuge system will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within refuges.
- Partnerships. America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat within wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, State agencies, Tribes, organizations, industry, and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the refuge system.

- Public Involvement. The public should be given a full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding acquisition and management of our national wildlife refuges (USFWS 2001a, b, c, d).

3.13.1.3.4 State of California

California does not have a comprehensive area-wide planning document similar to the CDCA, but state land uses within the project area are determined by several agencies including the CDPR, CDFG, and the CSLC.

3.13.2 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.13.2.1 Methodology and Significance Criteria

The Proposed Project and alternatives would be considered to have a significant adverse impact on wilderness and recreational resources if they would:

- Directly or indirectly disturb established federal, state, or local recreation areas or facilities;
- Restrict access to federal, state, local, or private recreational sites; or
- Substantially reduce the scenic, biological, cultural, geologic, or other important values of undeveloped federal, state, local, or private recreational sites or wilderness areas.

3.13.2.2 Proposed Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section identifies the potentially significant adverse impacts and required mitigation measures for the Proposed Project. In addition, as described in Sections 1 and 2, in response to comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR, a minor variation to the Proposed Project was developed (referred to as Variation PP1). Variation PP1 would remain in the same general alignment as the Proposed Project but would be shifted south approximately 150 feet into SCE's existing and approved PVD2 right-of-way. Therefore, unless noted below, the wilderness and recreation impacts of Variation PP1 would be similar to those identified for the Proposed Project.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact 1: *A new transmission line may result in the reduction of wilderness and recreation quality.*

Activities outside of wilderness area boundaries can impact recreational use within a wilderness area due to reduction of wilderness qualities and the sense of solitude from human activities. Construction noise, dust, and possible access restrictions are all temporary impacts to wilderness and recreation areas that would result from construction of the Proposed Project. Longer-term impacts would arise from the visual intrusion of transmission line structures across landscapes that provide little or no visual screening, allowing them to be seen by wilderness area and recreational visitors from certain perspectives. These are potential impacts that could affect wilderness and recreational quality.

The Proposed Project transmission line route would pass within 1 mile of the Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area, and within 1 to 5 miles of the Palen-McCoy Wilderness Area, the Little Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area, the Mecca Hills Wilderness Area, the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness Area, and Joshua Tree National Park, which includes extensive areas managed as wilderness. While there would not be a direct impact to any of these wilderness areas, the proposed transmission line would be seen from areas along the boundaries of these wilderness areas. Since the new transmission line would be located in a designated utility corridor and parallel numerous other linear projects, including I-10, other transmission lines, natural gas pipelines, an aqueduct, and a buried telephone line, the impact of this new transmission line would be minimal due to the existence of these other utilities and the distance from viewing points within these wilderness areas.

Similarly, dispersed recreational users of the project area near the Proposed Project alignment could experience impacts as the natural appearance of the landscape would be further diminished by the addition of the proposed transmission line. However, the project is close enough to other existing linear projects that this impact would be minor in nature.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact 2: *Construction activity could reduce access and visitation to wilderness and recreation areas during construction.*

As previously mentioned, the Proposed Project route would pass within close proximity of several wilderness areas. It is possible construction-related truck traffic and construction activity could temporarily delay access and/or degrade unimproved road conditions to the Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area, the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness Areas, the Corn Springs Campground, and the southwestern portion of Joshua Tree National Park in the vicinity of the Thermal Canyon Road and bicycle trail.

The Camp Young Divisional Camp is located just south of the Proposed Project route west of Chiriaco Summit. There are no developed recreational facilities at the historic camp site, though dispersed recreation may occur on a sporadic basis. Various existing roads passing through the site would be used during construction and maintenance of the Proposed Project route. Construction and maintenance activities could temporarily limit use of roads across the Camp Young site or cause delays. The General George S. Patton Memorial Museum is located on the north side of I-10 at Chiriaco Summit and would not be impacted by the Proposed Project since the transmission route is located on the south side of the highway.

For the recreational resources described above, impacts to access roads would be short-term in nature and less than significant in magnitude. While travel on these roads could be delayed by construction activities, they would not be blocked or access-restricted. Following the completion of construction, unpaved roads would be restored to their previous condition, and no permanent access-related impacts to these recreational resources would occur. An Access Road Use Plan would be developed to minimize impacts to public use of roads in the project area. This plan would conform to the requirements of the BLM, State, and local agencies as described in Section 2.2.4.1.

3.13.2.3 Alternative A Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The Alternative A transmission line route would differ from the Proposed Project route from approximately 2 miles east of Desert Center to about the Cactus City Rest Area. This portion of the Alternative A alignment, referred to as Option A-2, would parallel the existing SCE Devers to Palo Verde transmission line route 1 to 2 miles south of I-10 and the proposed transmission alignment.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact A1: *A new transmission line may result in the reduction of wilderness and recreation quality.*

The Alternative A, Option A-2 transmission line route would pass within 1 mile of the Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area, and within 1 to 5 miles of the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness Area, the Mecca Hills Wilderness Area, and wilderness areas in the southern portion of Joshua Tree National Park. While there would not be a direct impact to any of these wilderness areas, the proposed transmission line would be seen from areas along the boundaries of these wilderness areas. Over most of its course, the Option A-2 transmission line route would parallel an existing powerline. Since the new transmission line would parallel numerous other human impacts, including I-10, other transmission lines, natural gas pipelines, an aqueduct, and a buried telephone line, the impact of this new transmission line would be minimal due to the existence of these other utilities and the distance from viewing points within these wilderness areas. Impacts to dispersed recreational uses of the project area would be similar to those described for the Proposed Project.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact A2: *Construction activity may result in the reduction in access and visitation to wilderness and recreation areas during construction.*

Unless otherwise noted, impacts related to reduction in recreational access and visitation during construction would be the same as those described for the Proposed Project. The following is a description of impacts unique to Alternative A, Option A-2.

The Camp Young Divisional Camp is located south of I-10 west of Chiriaco Summit. There are no developed recreational facilities at the historic camp site, though dispersed recreation may occur on a sporadic basis. The Option A-2 alignment would pass through the camp area adjacent to the existing transmission line. While there are no developed recreational facilities in this area, construction related traffic and activity within the Camp Young area could disrupt or displace dispersed recreational activities here and cause delays on roads that pass through the site. These impacts to recreational access and use of this area would be short-term in nature and less than significant. While travel on these roads could be delayed by construction activities, they would not be blocked or access-restricted. An Access Road Use Plan would be developed to minimize impacts to public use of roads in the project area. This plan would conform to the requirements of the BLM, State, and local agencies as described in Section 2.2.4.1.

3.13.2.4 Alternative B Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Unlike the other project alternatives, Alternative B would follow a considerably different transmission line route than described for the Proposed Project. Alternative B parallels an existing Western 161-kV transmission line route from the Blythe area, south to SR-78. It then

parallels SR-78 to the community of Glamis, California. The route then proceeds northwest along the UPRR tracks before terminating at the Midway Substation. The Alternative B transmission route then resumes at the Coachella Substation and rejoins the Proposed Project transmission line route at the proposed new substation on Dillon Road (refer to Figure 3.13-1).

A small variation to Alternative B, referred to as Option B-1, is also under consideration. Option B-1 would avoid the Palo Verde Wilderness Area, utilizing a route that passes around the eastern side of the wilderness.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact B1: *A new transmission line may result in the reduction of wilderness and recreation quality.*

The Alternative B transmission line route parallels an existing 161-kV transmission line and an unimproved road through a gap between both portions of the Palo Verde Mountains Wilderness Area. Construction of the Alternative B transmission line would potentially impact visitors to the wilderness area due to dust, noise, and the presence of human activity, which could significantly diminish the wilderness experience. These impacts would only be experienced by visitors within auditory range, or with a line-of-sight perspective of the transmission line corridor. Following construction, the presence of the Alternative B transmission line would create a long-term visual impact to wilderness area visitors with a line-of-sight perspective of the line. The sight of both transmission lines and the unimproved road would diminish the wilderness experience, as they would contrast with the otherwise natural and undisturbed landscape within the wilderness area itself.

The Bradshaw Trail Backcountry Byway would be crossed by the Alternative B transmission line route in the Palo Verde Mesa area. At this location, the Alternative B transmission line would be constructed immediately adjacent to the existing 161-kV transmission line. Travelers on the trail would see the new transmission line, which could diminish the quality of the natural scenery in this area. However, since there is presently an existing 161-kV transmission line at this location, the implementation of Alternative B would simply increase the existing visual impact to recreational users of the trail.

After joining SR-78 to the south, the Alternative B transmission route passes within 3 miles of the Indian Pass Wilderness Area. While the wilderness qualities of this area (where the transmission would be visible) would be reduced by the addition of another transmission line, this impact would be less than significant because of the presence of the existing 161-kV transmission line and SR-78 in the same general corridor.

Northwest of Glamis, the Alternative B route parallels the eastern border of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area along the UPRR tracks. As described above, construction of the Alternative B transmission line would potentially impact visitors to the wilderness area due to dust, noise, and the presence of human activity, which could diminish the wilderness experience. These impacts would only be experienced by visitors within auditory range, or with a line-of-sight perspective of the transmission line corridor. Following construction, the presence of the Alternative B transmission line would create a long-term visual impact to wilderness area visitors with a line-of-sight perspective of the line. The sight of the transmission line would diminish the wilderness experience to some extent, although this impact would be less than significant because of the presence of the existing railroad and the Niland-Glamis Road.

For Option B-1, impacts to the users of the Palo Verde Wilderness Area would be reduced as construction-related activity and long-term visual impacts would occur to the east of the wilderness area boundary. While the Option B-1 transmission line would result in long-term visual impacts to users of the eastern portion of the wilderness area, the line would parallel SR-78 and other existing disturbance and would be less intrusive than the Alternative B route, which passes directly through the gap between the two portions of the wilderness area.

Given the less-disturbed character of the Alternative B portion of the project area, relative to the I-10 corridor, impacts to dispersed recreational uses of the project area associated with the implementation of Alternative B or Option B-1 would be greater than those described for the Proposed Project. Recreational visitors to this area seeking natural landscapes would experience some degradation of their recreational experience where the transmission line would be visible.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact B2: *Construction activity may result in the reduction in access and visitation to wilderness and recreation areas during construction.*

As previously mentioned, the Alternative B transmission line route would pass within close proximity of the Palo Verde Mountains and North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Areas. It is possible construction-related truck traffic and construction activity could temporarily limit or delay access to these wilderness areas. Similar impacts could be experienced at the Algodones Dunes Wildlife Viewing Area, the Bradshaw Trail Backcountry Byway, the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (Mammoth Wash Open Area), and the Mesquite Mine Overlook Trail. However, impacts to access would be very short-term in nature and less than significant in magnitude. An Access Road Use Plan would be developed to minimize impacts to public use of roads in the project area. This plan would conform to the requirements of the BLM, State, and local agencies as described in Section 2.2.4.1.

For Option B-1, no reduction in access and visitation to wilderness and recreation areas would be expected as this transmission alignment passes to the east of the Palo Verde Wilderness Area and is not routed near any other designated recreation resources in the project area. Short-term traffic delays could be experienced by dispersed recreational users of this portion of the project area during construction of the Option B-1 alignment.

3.13.2.5 Alternative C Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Wilderness and Recreation Impact C1: *A new transmission line may result in the reduction of wilderness and recreation quality.*

Since the Alternative C transmission line route is nearly identical to the Proposed Project, with the exception of the eastern portion of the project area, impacts to wilderness quality associated with Alternative C would be very similar to those described for the Proposed Project (see Figure 3.13-1). From the proposed Keim Substation/Switching Station near Blythe to the point where Alternative C and the Proposed Project share the same alignment, Alternative C would be routed closer to the Palen-McCoy Wilderness Area, just north of I-10. Visitors to the southern portions of this wilderness area that could see the project would experience a greater visual impact and reduction in wilderness quality than would be the case with the Proposed Project since it would follow the north side of I-10, as opposed to paralleling the existing SCE transmission line about

1 mile south of I-10. Since the I-10 corridor already features numerous linear utility projects in the area, the addition of the Alternative C transmission line would only result in minor impacts on the wilderness experience.

Conversely, the Alternative C alignment is farther from the Little Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area than the Proposed Project. Accordingly, the reduction in wilderness quality for visitors to this area would be less pronounced than would be the case for the Proposed Project.

Impacts to dispersed recreational uses of the project area associated with the implementation of Alternative C would be similar in nature to those described for the Proposed Project.

Wilderness and Recreation Impact C2: *Construction activity may result in the reduction in access and visitation to wilderness and recreation areas during construction.*

Impacts associated with reduction in access and visitation to wilderness areas and recreation sites would be the same as described for the Proposed Project.

3.13.2.6 No Project Alternative

Under the No Project Alternative the Proposed Project would not be built and no project related impacts would occur to wilderness and recreation resources.